



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

RICH ZIPPERER

**Testimony by Rep. Rich Zipperer
Before the Committee on Elections and Campaign Reform
2009 Assembly Bill 169
April 21, 2009**

Thank you, Chairman Smith, and committee members, for considering Assembly Bill 169 at this hearing today.

This legislation is a simple bill that I authored and introduced at the request of the Superintendent of the Elmbrook School District, Dr. Matt Gibson.

This legislation arose from the Superintendent's belief that the current required number of signatures for candidates for school board discourages many citizens who may otherwise run for school board from running, causing a lack of candidates for school board races.

Current law requires that candidates for school board in 1st class cities, currently only Milwaukee Public Schools, collect between 400 and 800 signatures in order to be placed on the ballot. For 2nd class cities, the requirement is 100 to 200 signatures, and for school districts that do not contain either a 1st or 2nd class city, a school district can decide to either not require signatures, or to require 20 signatures in order for a candidate to be placed on the ballot. For school districts that contain municipalities of varying class, current law requires they use the higher signature requirement for school board campaigns.

Assembly Bill 169 allows school districts that contain cities of different classes, such as the Elmbrook School District, to decide for themselves whether they follow current law, which requires that the rules of the highest class of city within the district be followed, or to allow the signature requirement of the lesser class of city contained within the district, if the school board so votes by a 2/3rds majority by at least the last Tuesday of the November preceding an election.

Dr. Gibson believes this simple reform will persuade more people to run for school board, as they will no longer be discouraged by the requirement of 100 signatures. Now, I understand for those of us who have run for election and worked on many campaigns, 100 signatures doesn't seem like all that many, but for a citizen who has never before run for office, I recognize why that might seem like a tall hill to climb.

I will not speak as to whether or not the number of required signatures is a factor in one's decision to run for school board, but this bill will allow local school districts to make that decision themselves, and perhaps will encourage more citizens to get involved in their local school board races.

Assembly Committee on Elections and Campaign Reform

Testimony of Kevin J. Kennedy
Director and General Counsel
Government Accountability Board
April 21, 2009

Chairperson Smith and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee and testify regarding Assembly Bill 169.

The proposed legislation permits school districts lying within more than one class of cities, except a district located in a first class city, to choose between allowing 100-200 signatures and 20-100 signatures on nomination papers for school board candidates. This legislation would primarily affect school districts with territory in a second class city and in another class of city, which currently must allow at least 100 but not more than 200 signatures on school board nomination papers. Second class cities are those between 39,000 and 150,000 in population. AB 169 also allows the possibility that a school district that currently requires 20-100 signatures may increase the threshold to 100-200 signatures.

From an administrative perspective, the legislation adds another variable, and possibly additional confusion, to issues regarding ballot access for school board candidates. G.A.B. staff regularly field calls from and advise school board officers and officials on election law requirements. The proposed legislation may tend to convert a straightforward determination under the current statutes into an analysis of the school district's boundaries and proposed or completed action of a school board or annual meeting.

While the Government Accountability Board has not taken a position on AB 169, the preference of G.A.B. staff is to require all school board candidates outside of first class cities to submit 100-200 signatures on nomination petitions, in order to promote uniformity throughout the state. Absent such a change, we favor maintaining the current statutory language so that candidates in districts with similar population characteristics are treated similarly, rather than being subject to signature requirements that may be changed from one election to the next by a two-thirds vote of the school board or electors at the annual meeting.

Thank you for considering this input regarding AB 169. The Government Accountability Board is certainly available to answer any questions or provide further assistance during consideration of this bill.

Kevin J. Kennedy
Director and General Counsel
Government Accountability Board
(608) 266-8005
Kevin.kennedy@wi.gov